THE TRIP TO NOVGOROD

In November, 1909, I was summoned to appear before the court in Novgorod for trial on the four-year-old Borovenka affair. The order had been sent to Ekaterinoslav by mistake. In Russia, a person sentenced by several courts had to serve only the longest term, so that the Borovenka case had been absorbed by the sentence of the military court at Ekaterinoslav. The summons to Novgorod was therefore a free ticket for a junket.

The trip began rather uncomfortably, in a prison coach packed with common criminals. Except for a handful of political prisoners, about half the party consisted of harmless tramps and the other half of recidivists—"regulars." Although I was in the ragged garb of a convict serving a forced labor sentence, my glasses made them suspect me of being a political, and the regulars treated me with unconcealed enmity. The bosses, "Ivans" in prison slang, were particularly hostile.

The first halt was in Kursk. The party was herded to the prison on the outskirts of the city and locked up in the deportation barracks. Here other parties were added to the Ekaterinoslav crowd, and we all were taken to a barnlike ward. The criminals, recidivists and tramps alike, rushed through the gates, fighting for the better places on the floor. I was tossed aside, and when I passed the gate the only place left was a stinking straw sack beside the cell buckets. I preferred to spend the night sitting on the bench rather than lie down in loathsome filth.

The common criminals noticed my predicament. Somebody shouted, "You, political, you don't like to be treated like us others." I did not answer. A man in chains and manacles, an important "Ivan" to judge by his manner, came to me and asked, "What is your name?" When I gave it, he said loudly, so that everyone in the room could hear him, "Are you, mister, the one who exposed the brutes of Ekaterinoslav? We know that you made no distinction between your pals and our men. We appreciate it when anyone is fair to our people."

He took my bag and led me to the row under the window where I was offered the best sack of straw. For the rest of the trip I did not have to carry my bag, rush for a better place in the ward, or wait in line for hot water. The "Ivans" did their best to make my journey as comfortable as possible. They even extended the same favors to other politicals in the party.

In Novgorod I was locked up in the deportation ward with nondescript petty offenders, the overflow of the scum of St. Petersburg.